

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-13

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DEPT FOR NEA PLEASE PASS AMB MOYNIHAN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT PINS IN

SUBJ: SITUATION IN GUJARAT

REF BOMBAY 0236

1. LAW AND ORDER. BARRING A FEW STONE THROWING INCIDENTS AHMEDABAD WAS QUIET 29TH WITH CURFEW RELAXED FROM ONE TO SIX PM. SITUATION ELSE WHERE STATE GENERALLY QUIET ALTHOUGH FRESH OUTBREAK VIOLENCE IN SURAT ON 29TH BROUGHT IMPOSITION DUSK TO DAWN CURFEW. CURFEW ALSO IMPOSED IN PALANPUR ON 29TH WHEN MOB GHERAOED CONGRESS MLA DEMANDING HIS RESIGNATION.

2. POLITICAL FRONT. GOI INDECISION ABOUT GUJARAT HAS EMBOLDENED CONGRESS DISSIDENTS THERE TO PRESS FOR CHIEF MIN PATEL'S RESIGNATION AND IMPOSITION PRESIDENT'S RULE AND THEY HAVE TAKEN THIS POSITION IN THEIR MEETING WITH GOI
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MINISTER PANT WHO SENT GUJARAT IN SEARCH POLITICAL SOLUTION.

WE UNDERSTAND SOME 50 OF THE 140 CONGRESS MLA'S ARE SUPPORTING SUCH AN OUSTER MOVE WHICH HAS BEEN GATHERING SUPPORT AND MOMENTUM THROUGHOUT STATE. GPCC PRESIDENT DARJI MOREOVER HAS JOINED DISSIDENTS AND REPORTEDLY TOLD PANT THAT CHIEF MIN PATEL HAS TO GO. LEADERS OF STUDENT "YOUTH REGENERATION" MOVEMENT (NAVNIIRMAN YUVAK SAMITI) HAVE ALSO DEMANDED IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION CHIEF MIN IN THEIR MEETING WITH PANT. FOR THEIR PART LEADING OPPOSITION PARTIES, JANA SANGH AND CONGRESS (O), ARE NOT SURPRISINGLY DEMANDING FRESH ELECTIONS. ACCORDING PRESS REPORTS, JANA SANGH NATIONAL PRES ADVANI HAS SUBMITTED MEMO TO PRES GIRI URGING RESIGNATION PATEL, DISSOLUTION ASSEMBLY AND FRESH ELECTIONS.

4. PRESS REACTION. LEAD EDITORIAL BOMBAY EDITION TIMES OF INDIA TODAY CALLS ON CENTRE "TO END AGONY OF GUJARAT" AND TO IMPOSE PRESIDENT'S RULE. "FOR THREE HARROWING WEEKS GUJARAT HAS BEEN ROCKED BY UNPRECEDENTED FOOD RIOTS. NEVER BEFORE HAVE SO MANY TOWNS AND CITIES IN A STATE BEEN UNDER CURFEW FOR SO LONG AS IN GUJARAT SINCE FIRST WEEK OF JANUARY. NOR HAVE SO MANY PEOPLE ANYWHERE ELSE FACED POLICE BULLETS WITH SUCH GRIM DETERMINATION TO PROTEST AGAINST RISING PRICES AND MALADMINISTRATION." (SENIOR GUJARATI JOURNALIST NIRUBHAI DESAI, REFTTEL, WHO SAYS HE HAS BEEN WITNESS TO EVERY MAJOR POLITICAL EVENT IN GUJARAT BEGINNING WITH THAT OF 1919 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT, STATES HAPPENINGS OVER PAST THREE WEEKS WITH DEATH TOLL REACHING 42 UNPARALLELED AND WITHOUT PRECEDENT IN GUJARAT.) EDITORIAL NOTES FOOD AGITATION NOT CONTRIVED BY ANTI-SOCIAL ELEMENTS BUT RATHER "ALL EVIDENCE GOES TO SHOW THAT UNORGANIZED STUDENTS ARE IN FOREFRONT." IN CALLING FOR A RAISING OF THE STANDARD OF PUBLIC LIFE, GIRILAL JAIN IN SEPARATE ARTICLE IN TIMES TODAY SPECULATES THAT "THE CURRENT AGITATION IN GUJARAT MAY WELL TURN OUT TO BE A WATER-SHED IN THE PUBLIC LIFE NOT ONLY OF GUJARAT BUT THE WHOLE COUNTRY." FREE PRESS JOURNAL, IN ITS LEAD EDITORIAL BOMBAY EDITION TODAY, DESCRIBES CURRENT SITUATION GUJARAT AS "GRAVE-YARD PEACE" AND WARNS THAT DISCONTENT OF PEOPLE MAY AGAIN EXPLODE WHEN ARMY WITHDRAWN UNLESS "PROMPT MEASURES TAKEN TO MEET THEIR LEGITIMATE AND HITHERTO NEGLECTED NEEDS". CONCLUDES "IF NOT PRESIDENT'S RULE, THE SITUATION CALLS FOR A MINISTERIAL SHAKE-UP."

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5. COMMENT: THERE ARE NO EASY OR HAPPY CHOICES FOR CENTRE IN GUJARAT. AS SITUATION HAS SHAPED UP, IT INCREASINGLY APPEARS THAT IT MAY BE MORE DETRIMENTAL TO PARTY'S INTERESTS TO TRY AND DRAG ITS FEET IN GUJARAT UNTIL AFTER FORTHCOMING U.P. ELECTIONS THAN IN MOVING TO IMPOSE PRESIDENT'S RULE NOW OR TO PRESSURE CHIEF MIN PATEL TO RESIGN. WHILE MINISTERIAL SHAKEUP WOULD LIKELY BE MORE APPEALING TO

CONGRESS LEADERSHIP, WE WOULD EXPECT PATEL TO BE MOST UNWILLING (HE SAYS HE WILL NOT STEP DOWN) AND CENTRE MAY FIND IMPOSITION PRESIDENT'S RULE EASIER METHOD EMPLOY THAN PRESSURE ON PATEL. PRESIDENT'S RULE WOULD ALSO GIVE CENTRE BREATHING SPACE IN TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHAT TO DO NEXT WHEN U.P. ELECTIONS OVER. NEEDLESS SAY FRESH ELECTIONS ARE NOT IN CARDS FOR OBVIOUS REASONS.

6. WHATEVER THE CENTRE DOES OR DOES NOT DO IN THE POLITICAL ARENA IN DAYS AHEAD IT MUST BOTH RECOGNIZE AS WELL AS TAKE MORE EFFECTIVE MEASURES THAN IT HAS TO DATE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH ROOT CAUSE POPULAR UNREST GUJARAT. PORTFOLIO JUGGLING UNLIKELY SUFFICE AND WITHDRAWAL OF ARMY BEFORE SOME TANGIBLE STEPS TAKEN MEET POPULAR DEMANDS LIKELY BE FOLLOWED BY RENEWED UNREST
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